Committee on Resources

Witness Testimony

Lincoln National Historic Trail

By: Leonard E. Lock, Jr., Chairman

City of Ottawa

Historic Preservation Commission

The National Park Service wrote in 1987: "The growing division of the country between north and south was reflected in the use of the Illinois River and Illinois-Michigan Canal by Senator Stephen A. Douglas and Abraham Lincoln to travel to towns in the 1850's, bringing their separate views of slavery and the expansion of that institution into the territories! The political skill that Lincoln demonstrated in his talks gained him the Republican nomination and election to the presidency in 1860.11

Thomas Gilbert, Manager of Trials for the National Park Service in Madison, Wisconsin, wrote on July 26, 1994: "The . . . National Historic Trail is a viable proposal because it was found to qualify and to be both feasible and desirable."

Gilbert, of the National Park Service, continued: "The National Park Service feasibility study of the (National Historic) Trail concluded that the route met the criteria for both national historic trials and national scenic trails. However, the study concluded that creating a national historic trail would be, in this case, much more feasible than a national scenic trail. If and when Congress passes the necessary amendment to Section 5 (2) of the National Trails System Set, we will proceed with the preparation of a comprehensive management plan and administration of the trail.

The Illinois Department of Conservation in a January 1994 report read: "The Department supports and will pursue additional partnership with the National Park Service to realize National Historic Trail status for the . . . Trial, the Illinois River Waterway and Illinois and Michigan Canal (deemed appropriate by a 1986 National Park Service study)."

"The Illinois Historic Preservation Agency . . . advises the National Park Service regarding management of the National Historic Trails in Illinois.11

Here is the priceless Lincoln legacy on the Illinois and Michigan Canal as follows:

While serving in the Illinois House of Representatives in 1835, "Honest Abe Lincoln" told his friend, Joshua Speed at Springfield, that he aimed at being called "the DeWitt Clinton of Illinois," achieving for his state what a constructive statesman had done for New York in getting the Erie Canal built. Thus, Abe Lincoln can properly be called "Illinois' DeWitt Clinton" for the Illinois and Michigan Canal.

As a member of the Illinois House of Representatives on March 5, 1841, the Sangamon Journal reported, "Lincoln sought diligently, both in committee and on the House floor, measures to complete the Illinois and

Michigan canal. 11 A great deal, if not all, the completed language of this bill was unquestionably of Lincoln's hand.

"Lincoln offered an amendment allowing Illinois to spend an additional sum in bonds for completion of the I&M Canal. Someone made a motion to slice the sum in hand, and 'Honest Abel concurred with the measure without debate. Wickliffe Kitchell, a former Illinois attorney general, who had resigned to enter the Illinois House, declared with amazement that Illinois "already prostrated by debt . . . that gentlemen (Lincoln) thought it would be for the best interest of the state to go still deeper."

"Kitchell then ridiculed Lincoln.

"Honest Abe I begged leave to tell an anecdote. The gentleman's course the past winter, he said, reminded him of an eccentric old bachelor who lived in the Hoo6'ler State. Like the gentleman from Montgomery (Kitchell) he was very famous for seeing big bugaboos in everything.

"He lived with an older brother and one day he went out hunting. His brother heard him firing back of the field and went out to see what was the matter. He found him loading and f iring as fast as possible at the top of a tree. Not being able to discover anything in the tree, he asked him what he was f iring at. He replied, a squirrel - and kept on firing. His brother, believing there was some humbug about the matter, examined his person and found on one of his eyelashes a big louse crawling about.

"It is so with the gentleman from Montgomery, Lincoln said. He imagined he could see squirrels every day, when they are nothing but lice. The Journal stated that after Lincoln's anecdote, the house 'was convulsed with laughter. I A spectator said the laughter was so great at the time "all business was at once suspended.' In vain the speaker rapped with his gavel. Members of all parties, without distinction, were compelled to laugh. They not only laughed, but they screamed and yelled: they thumped upon the f loor with their canes; they clapped their hands; they threw up their hats . . .

"For the remainder of the session he (Kitchell) lapsed into profound obscurity."

As the middle west developed, there were requests for the federal government to aid in the developing of harbors, canals and rivers for shipping. President James K. Polk has no such interest in these inland waterways. He maintained only salt-water ports were of federal interest, meaning the Atlantic coast would be favored.

A great deal of interest prevailed in the area waterways and a Harbor and River Convention was held in the small city of Chicago, July 4, 5, 6, 7 of 1847. Over 10,000 delegates attended, sleeping in tents, hotels, boats and huts.

The feeling for and against developing Midwest waterways went strong. New York sent 300 delegates. Other eastern states sent equally large representation.

Many speeches were made and one Easterner, very prominent in legal matters, gave an arousing talk against Midwest development. The cause seemed lost for Northern Illinois. Then a call went out to hear the new representative in Congress from Sangamon County, Abraham Lincoln.

The audience hushed into silence. Who was the man who dared to reply to David Dudley Field, the great jurist from New York, who bitterly opposed the development?

A tall, gaunt, awkward man about 38 years old, rose, addressed the chair. The audience gazed in astonishment at the new speaker with the bony face, the lofty forehead and unkempt hair. His unique appearance and mannerisms attracted the audience. His deliberate, unusual voice held them. Lincoln indicated that Field was treading on dangerous ground. He said that he was astounded at the logic of so distinguished a constitutional lawyer. He grew warm in his comment about his respect to the founders of our Republic and made reference to the Pilgrims and other daring progressive sections of the humanity which came to build the foundation of our Republic.

The truth of these statements forced itself upon the listeners, who were irresistibly drawn by the strange eloquence. They followed Abe, enchanted, as he wove a chain of strong evidence against David Dudley Field. Lincoln asked how many states New York covered. He declared that the Federal government was annually appropriating millions of dollars on the Hudson River and that his enormous expenditure could be saved since Field's own logic reasoned that the rivers which flow in but one state cannot hope to get federal funds. Then, added Lincoln, according to the geography of the East, the great Hudson, flowing only in New York State, shall be from now on without the federal missions.

The effect was electric. A backwoodsman had vanquished a silk stocking orator. He had thrown a new light on the constitutional fallacy as viewed by New York and other older states. He declared and convinced his listeners that the federal government should be and would be interested in anything that would bring strength and perpetuity to the federal constitution. Lincoln had shown that Chicago was on the Great Lakes waterway which bathed the shores of Michigan, Illinois, Ohio, Pennsylvania and New York, while the far northwest held promise of future states. A reorganization and refinancing of the Illinois and Michigan were accomplished. The state appointed the Canal trustees who were able to obtain the loans to complete the job in 1848.

Lincoln got "the hang of the House, 11 as he called it, and made several speeches on internal improvements, public roads, rivers, harbors, canals, saying in one speech that so far as he could see there was the same wrangling in the state legislatures and in counties and towns as there was in the national Congress, over improvements. "One man is offended because a road passes over his land, and another is offended because it does not pass over his: one is dissatisfied because the bridge for which he is taxed crosses the river on a different road from that which leads from his house to the town: another cannot bear that the country should be got in debt for these same roads and brides: while not a few struggle hard to have roads located over their lands, and then stoutly refuse to let them be opened until they are first paid the damages."

As a first step toward fair dealing out of the nations, money for needed improvements among the states, Lincoln suggested statistical information to guide congressmen, saying he did not see much force in one members objection "to counting all the pigs and chickens in the land." Though the speech was mainly constructive and practical, it was lighted with the observation, "An honest laborer digs coal at about seventy cents a day, while the President digs abstractions at about seventy dollars a day. The coal is clearly worth more than the abstractions.,,

Mainly, the speech was coaxing, advisory, conciliatory, hoping to get practical work done. "Difficulty though there be, let us meet and encounter it. Determine that the thing can and shall be done, and then we shall find the way. Let us contribute his might in the way of suggestions. 11 He was voicing the wishes of the Chicago river and harbor convention. To pay for canals with canal tolls and tonnage duties, before canals were dug, was like the Irishman and his new boots. "I shall never git lem on till I wear lem a day or two, and stretch lem a little."

In a speech in the United States House of Representatives on "Internal Improvements," June 20, 1848, Abraham Lincoln stated: "take for instance, the Illinois and Michigan Canal, considered apart from its effects, it is perfectly local. Every inch of it is within the State of Illinois. That canal was first opened for business last April. In a very few days we were all gratified to learn, among other things, that sugar had been carried from New Orleans through this canal to Buffalo in New York. This sugar took this route doubtless because it was cheaper than the old route. Supposing the benefit of the reduction in the cost of carriage to be shared between seller and buyer, the result is, that the New Orleans merchant sold his sugar a little dearer, and the people of Buffalo sweetened their coffee a little cheaper than before - a benefit resulting from the canal, not to Illinois where the canal is, but to Louisiana nd New York, where it is not.

In other transactions, Illinois will, of course, have her share, and perhaps the larger share too, in the benefits of the canal; but the instance of sugar clearly shows that the benefits of an improvement are by no means confined to the particular locality of the improvement itself."

Just as the benefits of an improvement, as Lincoln said in 1848, "are by no means confined to the particular locality of the improvement itself," this principle should substantiate justification for the Illinois and Michigan Canal National Historic Trail.

Ottawa's Washington Square, site of the first famous LincolnDouglas debate, and the Illinois and Michigan Canal are tangible links in the history of the United States. They are a special part of America's heritage commemorating the natioii-s's past ranking the same status as Bunker Hill in Boston, Mass.; Mount Vernon, VA, the Alamo in Texas, or the Chesapeake and Ohio National Historical Park in Washington, D. C. - a special part of America's heritage worth of a place on the Department of the Interior's roll of landmarks commemorating the nation's past.

The Illinois and Michigan canal was the greatest of the Midwest canals. This historic artery of travel was a triumph of early enterprise and contributed immeasurably to the growth of Chicago and Northern Illinois. Just as the Erie Canal made New York City the dominant metropolis in the East, so did the Illinois and Michigan Canal propel Chicago into prominence as a lading grain market and meat packing center in the Midwest. Linking Chicago to the Mississippi River, the canal completed a continuous waterway from Buffalo, New York, to New Orleans - thus a national artery of travel.

The National Park Service plaque at Channahon, Illinois, reads: "Illinois and Michigan Canal (Locks and towpath) has been designated a Registered National Historic Landmark - under the provisions of the Historic Sites Act of August 21, 1935. This site possesses exceptional value in commemorating and illustrating the history of the United States. United States Department of the Interior. National Park Service. 1963.11

The National Park Service, Criteria for Parklands, states the following regarding Registered National Historic Landmarks: "If it is further determined that the area (Illinois and Michigan Canal in this case) might qualify for National Park status, further studies may be conducted. However, in addition to being of national significance, areas considered for inclusion in the National Park System must further meet the criteria of suitability and feasibility."

The National Park Service Feasibility Study and Environmental Assessment concluded that: "The proposed Illinois (National Historic) Trail route would qualify as a national historic trail. The objective of such a trail would be to identify and preserve for public use and enjoyment, the major historic transportation link between two of the nations' great waterway systems -- the Mississippi River and the Great Lakes/St.

Lawrence River. The Illinois Waterway, along with the Erie Canal, afforded an all-water transportation link between New York and New Orleans. Successors to the Erie and the Illinois and Michigan canals have continued to provide that linkage to the present day. A national historic trail would give people an opportunity to understand and appreciate the significance of this transportation system and the evolution of uses to the present day. The interpretive theme would be the importance and impact of the Illinois River and the Illinois and Michigan Canal as a route of transportation, migration and commerce in the development of our nation."

"Now he belongs to the ages", is the oft-quoted remark made at Lincoln's deathbed. He belongs to our age as well. He belongs to the Nation and Illinois and in a very real sense, Abraham Lincoln and all that he represented, belongs to the national landmarks especially Washington Square and the Illinois and Michigan Canal.

Lincoln, his wife and their two sons, traveled the entire length of the Illinois and Michigan Canal on October 8, 1848, during a trip from Washington, D.C., to Springfield, Illinois.

The Story of Little Eddie *Lincoln*

Sometime soon, when you take your children for a walk along the old Illinois-Michigan Canal towpath and try to tell them the story of the I-M Canal, it may be hard for them to imagine that this little ditch was one of the main lifelines of mid-America. Perhaps you might tell them the little-known story of Little Eddie. Every word is true.

If you had been standing on the canal towpath on October 8, 1848, you would have seen a long, slender passenger boat coming toward the Fox River Aqueduct of the I-M Canal in Ottawa. Little Eddie would have been standing on the deck, holding his dad's hand. His mother and his brother, Robert Todd Lincoln, would have been standing beside him. Little Eddie loved the trip, and this is sad because he was never to make another.

Eddie was on his way home, but he must hardly have known what home meant, because he had lived very little at all in a real home.

His dad had been sent to congress when Eddie was 1-1/2 years old and his mother and dad took the boys for a month's visit with relatives in Kentucky; then they went up the Ohio River and over the mountains to Washington. But Eddie's mother did not like living in a boarding house, so she took the boys back to Kentucky. The lonesome father wrote little letters to Eddie. In one he reported a fruitless search in the stores of Washington for little plaid stockings for "Eddie's dear little feet," but said he would make another try at it.

Eddie, like his dad, was very fond of cats and one day in Kentucky in 1848, a little kitten came across the yard and Eddie asked a man if he could have it. He carried it triumphantly into the house, fed it bread and water. Eddie's grandmother hated all cats and had a servant throw it out of the house, even though Eddie protested loudly.

At last, the family decided to retuiri to their home in Illinois, journeyed to Buffalo, New York and sailed on the steamer, Globe, for Chicago, took the I-M Canal to LaSalle-Peru, boarded another steamer to Peoria, then went by stagecoach to Springfield, their home town. But when they arrived, they found they could not stay in their own house because it was rented. So they lived in hotels, boarding houses, or with relatives

until the home was finally available in the summer of 1849.

But soon after they moved into the house Eddie became ill, and after two months, not yet four years old, he died. He had traveled many thousands of miles and had lived at home less than three-fifths of his short life.

An unsigned poem named "Little Eddie" appeared a week later in the Illinois Journal, a newspaper.

People who know about these things believe Eddie's dad wrote it. The last stanza of "Little Eddie,' says:

> Angel boy - fare thee well, farewell Sweet
> Eddie, we bid thee adieu!
> Affection's wail cannot reach thee now,
> Deep though it be, and true
> Bright is the home to him now given,
> For of such is the kingdom of heaven.

I think Eddie's dad wrote it. You see, his dad, who must have felt very sorry about losing him, had the same last line engraved on Eddie's tombstone:

"Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven."

Oh, I almost forgot to tell you, Eddie's mother's name was Mary Todd Lincoln. His dad's name was Abraham.

If you had stood on the towpath that day in 1848, you could have waved to Little Eddie Lincoln. I am sure he would have waved back to you.

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FROM:

Draft National Trail Feasibility Study and

Environmental Assessment

Illinois Trail

,June, 1986

U. S. Department of the Interior / National Park Service

Appendix A: Illinois Trail Study, Historical Significance

As a state legislator from 1834 to 1842, Abraham Lincoln gave his wholehearted support for building the

canal. With the completion of the Illinois and Michigan Canal in 1848, change came in the course of northern commerce. No longer did the bulk of area products flow downstream to St. Louis and New Orleans. In-fact the Illinois and Michigan Canal, along with such other canals as the Ohio and Erie, caused New Orleans to go into decline as a major port. instead, the Illinois and Michigan Canal began the propulsion of Chicago into a position of national importance. In addition to that city, population centaurs such as Peoria, LaSalle/Peru, Ottawa, and Joliet developed along the waterway as manufacturing points. The hope of economic reward also brought farmers in large numbers to settle along the river.

The growing division in the country between North and South was reflected in the use of the Illinois River by Senator Stephen A. Douglas and Abraham Lincoln to travel to towns in the 1850s, bringing their separate views of slavery and the expansion of that institution into the territories. The political skill that Lincoln demonstrated in his talks gained him the Republican nomination and election to the presidency in 1860.

During the early part of the Civil War, navigation was suspended on the lower Mississippi River. This situation made northern waterways very important as naval vessel routes and for shipping war materials. The Illinois River and the Illinois and Michigan Canal comprised one of the important water systems. This route, however, had it limitations because of the narrowness of the canal and seasonal low water on a portion of the river. As a result, several efforts were made in and outside the United States Congress to have the federal government make navigational improvements to the waterway. Although Lincoln, as president, requested such action in his annual addresses to Congress in 1862 and 1863, all attempts failed.

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